

JOURNAL FOR BIBLICAL STUDIES
TO EQUIP THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

ISRAEL AND THE
CHURCH

July 2025 | Volume 7, Issue 1

THEME

*The Suffering of
the Jewish people*



THEME

The Suffering of the Jewish People

4. The Suffering of the Jewish People
in Biblical Times
Dr. James E. Patrick
12. The Suffering of Jews in the
Post-Biblical Era
Rev. Cornelis Kant
17. Shoah and Theology
Dr. Tobias Krämer
25. Jewish Suffering after the Shoah
Kees de Vreugd
30. 'With all My heart and with all My soul'
Rev. Jaap de Vreugd

Colophon

Israel and the Church is a journal for Biblical and theological reflections concerning Israel and the Church in God's plan for this world in the light of His coming Kingdom.

Editorial Team

Rev. W.J.J. Glashouwer,
Rev. C.G. Kant, Dr. Tobias Krämer,
Dr. J. Patrick, C.C. de Vreugd (MDiv)

Address

P.O. Box 1100
3860 BC Nijkerk
The Netherlands
Phone: +31 33 245 88 24
E-mail: keesdevreugd@cvi.nl
www.c4israel.org

Israel and the Church is a publication
of Christians for Israel International.

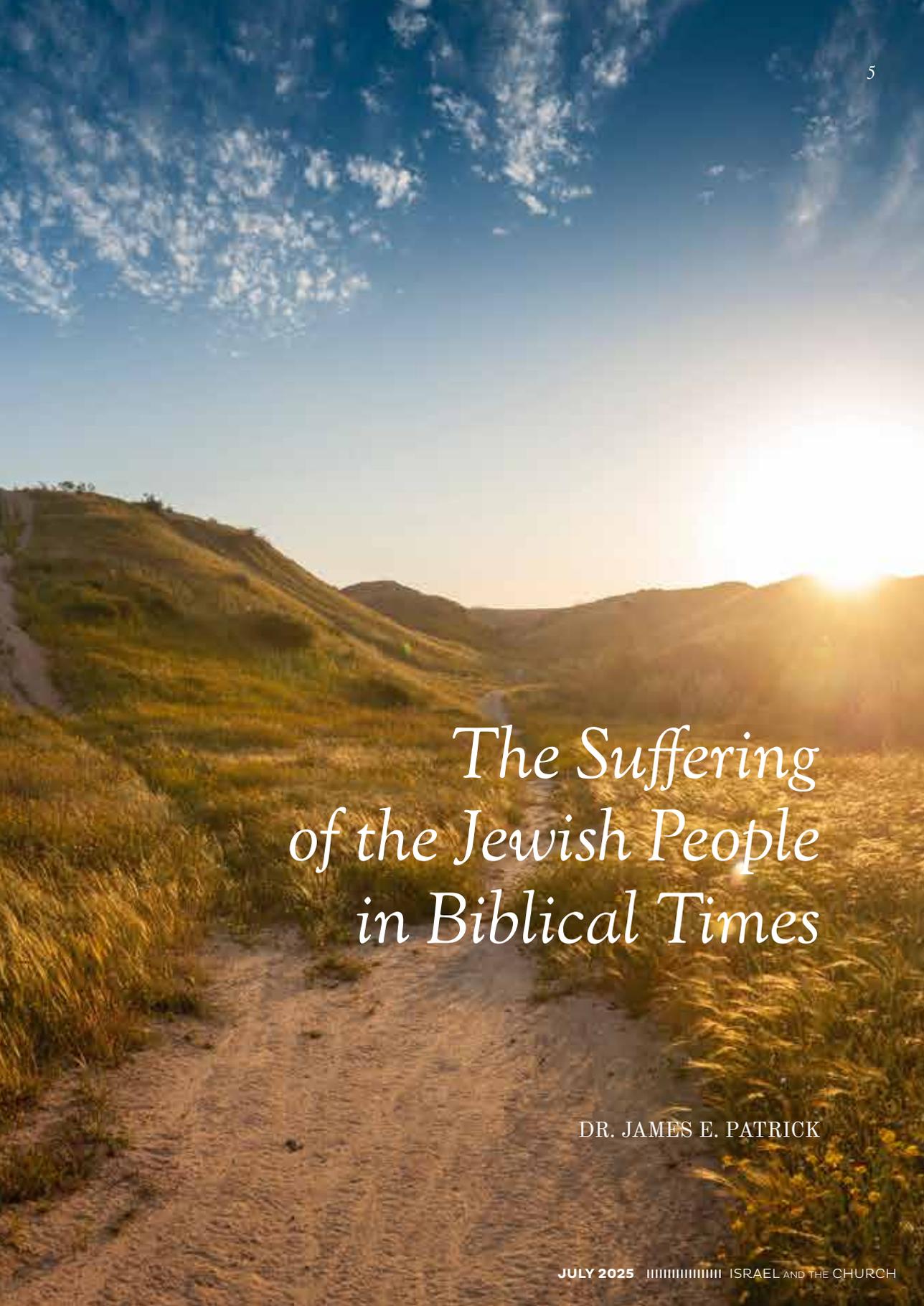
Design

BladenMakers (concept), Nijkerk
The Netherlands
Quartel Media, Hoogland
The Netherlands

Photos

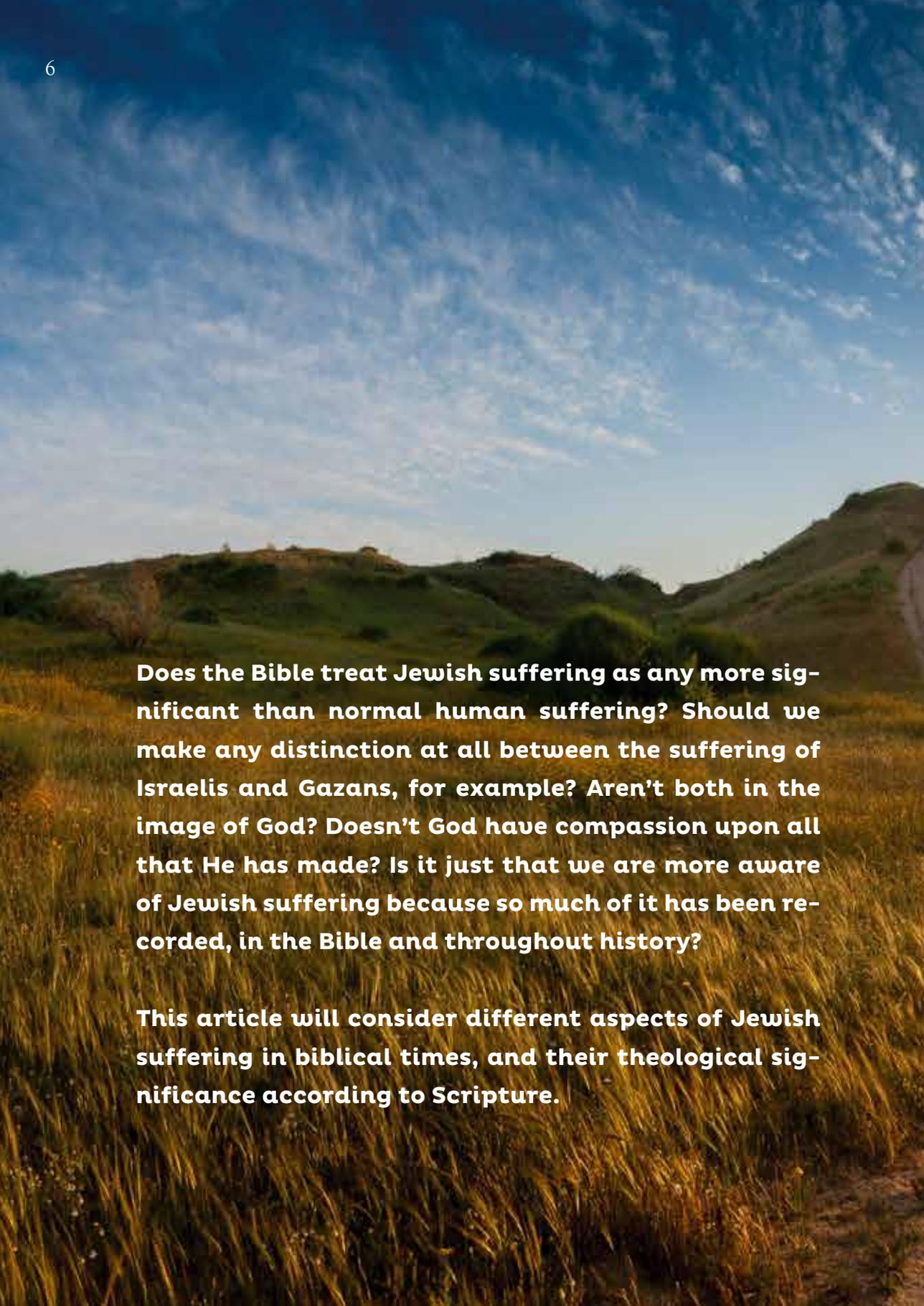
Christians for Israel International,
Shutterstock





*The Suffering
of the Jewish People
in Biblical Times*

DR. JAMES E. PATRICK



Does the Bible treat Jewish suffering as any more significant than normal human suffering? Should we make any distinction at all between the suffering of Israelis and Gazans, for example? Aren't both in the image of God? Doesn't God have compassion upon all that He has made? Is it just that we are more aware of Jewish suffering because so much of it has been recorded, in the Bible and throughout history?

This article will consider different aspects of Jewish suffering in biblical times, and their theological significance according to Scripture.

For this reason, whenever the Jewish people suffer among the nations, the God of their ancestors is particularly attentive. However long the suffering may last, He will always remember His covenant promise to rescue them and bring them back to their fathers' land.

2. THEY SUFFER AS PEOPLE WHO ARE SPECIALLY LOVED BY GOD

But the sons of Israel also have their own covenant with God. At Mount Sinai, the God whom Abraham knew as 'El Shaddai' (Genesis 17:1-5) now gave Himself a new covenant name 'Adonai' (YHWH) – Exodus 3:13-15. This new name signified the new covenant He was making specifically with Abraham's descendants, the whole nation of Israel. By this identity He would now be known 'to all generations'.

This new name – He who is and who will be the same – is closely connected to His new relationship with Israel as "Adonai your God". This new relationship will be proved by new actions. He would rescue Israel from their suffering in Egypt, and He would bring them to the promised land and give it to them to inherit (Exodus 6:2-8). This is why the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Torah of Moses repeatedly remind Israel how Adonai rescued them from suffering (Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 4:20; 6:20-25; 26:5-9; etc.).

God rescues Israel out of their suffering, not just from a sense of duty to keep His promises, but because He loves them. He has chosen Israel to be 'My special treasure' (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Psalm 135:4). In each of these uses of the word *segulah*, God says explicitly that Israel has a more special status 'out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth', and even 'high above all nations which He has made'.

This choice of Israel was not because of their own virtue or qualities, 'but because Adonai loved you'. He 'set His love on you' (Deuteronomy 7:7-8), even though He created all nations and gives inheritance to all of them without exception (Deuteronomy 32:8; Psalm 86:9; Acts 17:26). This is why, when they must pass through suffering depicted as waters or fire, He preserves them because 'you are precious in My sight, you are honoured and I love you'. He will even give other peoples in exchange for them (Isaiah 43:1-4).

But it is precisely because Israel is such a beloved son of God, that he must be disciplined with suffering. As Amos 3:2 says, 'You only have I chosen [known] among all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your



they are content to keep suffering. On the contrary, they cry out for their silent God to answer them and rescue them (Psalm 44:23-26; 69:3, 13-18). And this is exactly the same reaction as was made by the most well-known sufferer in human literature – Job. Job was not claiming to be a perfect human (Job 6:24; 7:21; 13:26), but he was confident that this severe suffering was not at all proportionate to any sin he may have committed (10:1-7). So he appeals to God as his witness in heaven, because God is a righteous judge (16:18-21; 23:3-7).

Although Job does not realise, we readers know that Satan, the Adversary in the heavenly court, challenged whether Job really cared more for the personal benefits of worshipping God. Since Job was God's most righteous servant on earth, this challenge also questioned whether God Himself truly deserved to be worshiped, or was just buying popularity. Both Job and God were vindicated in the end by Job's behaviour in suffering. Job insisted that his God would never inflict unfair suffering, and therefore demanded that God should publicly reward the righteous sufferer with honour on earth, even by raising him to life again after death if necessary (14:7-15; 19:23-27). God said that Job had spoken correctly about Him (42:7).

We should note also that Job was not Jewish, so when the people of Israel preserved the book of Job in their Scriptures, they showed awareness that righteousness before God is not only possible for those who know God's revealed Torah (Romans 2:14-16, 26-27). Non-Jews may also be righteous in God's eyes and yet suffer unjustly, as Jews do, for God's sake.

4. THEY SUFFER AS THOSE WITH GOD'S AUTHORITY TO BLESS OTHER NATIONS

It is not just because of their righteousness that Jewish people suffer, especially in attacks instigated by Satan. It is also because Israel carries legal authority from God to bless all other families and peoples on earth. In every generation from creation onwards, God's appointed authority was given to only one son to rule over the oth-

ers. God chose Seth not Cain, Shem not Japheth, Abram not Lot, Isaac not Ishmael, and Jacob not Esau. But all twelve of Jacob's sons received a blessing, showing that the inherited authority now belonged to the whole nation of Israel. 'Blessed is everyone who blesses you, and cursed is everyone who curses you' (Numbers 24:9).

It is inevitable, however, that when one son is chosen to bless the others, they may choose not to accept it, and instead rebel against God's choice of that son rather than one of them. Among Jacob's sons, he did give extra 'first-born' blessings to the sons of Leah (Judah) and Rachel (Joseph), and unsurprisingly Joseph's brothers would not agree to being ruled by their youngest brother. Instead, they sold him into slavery and suffering. But as he himself later explained to them, God only used that evil to bring about even greater good and blessing, both to his brothers and to 'all the earth' (Genesis 50:20; 41:57; 45:5; Psalm 105:16-19).

Throughout history, the Jewish people have suffered at the hands of other nations, who are usually jealous that God evidently gave this small nation a superior ability to bless all other nations. Rather than humbly blessing the chosen distributor of God's grace, they kill the favoured son in the hope of taking his place, and must therefore receive only the curse.

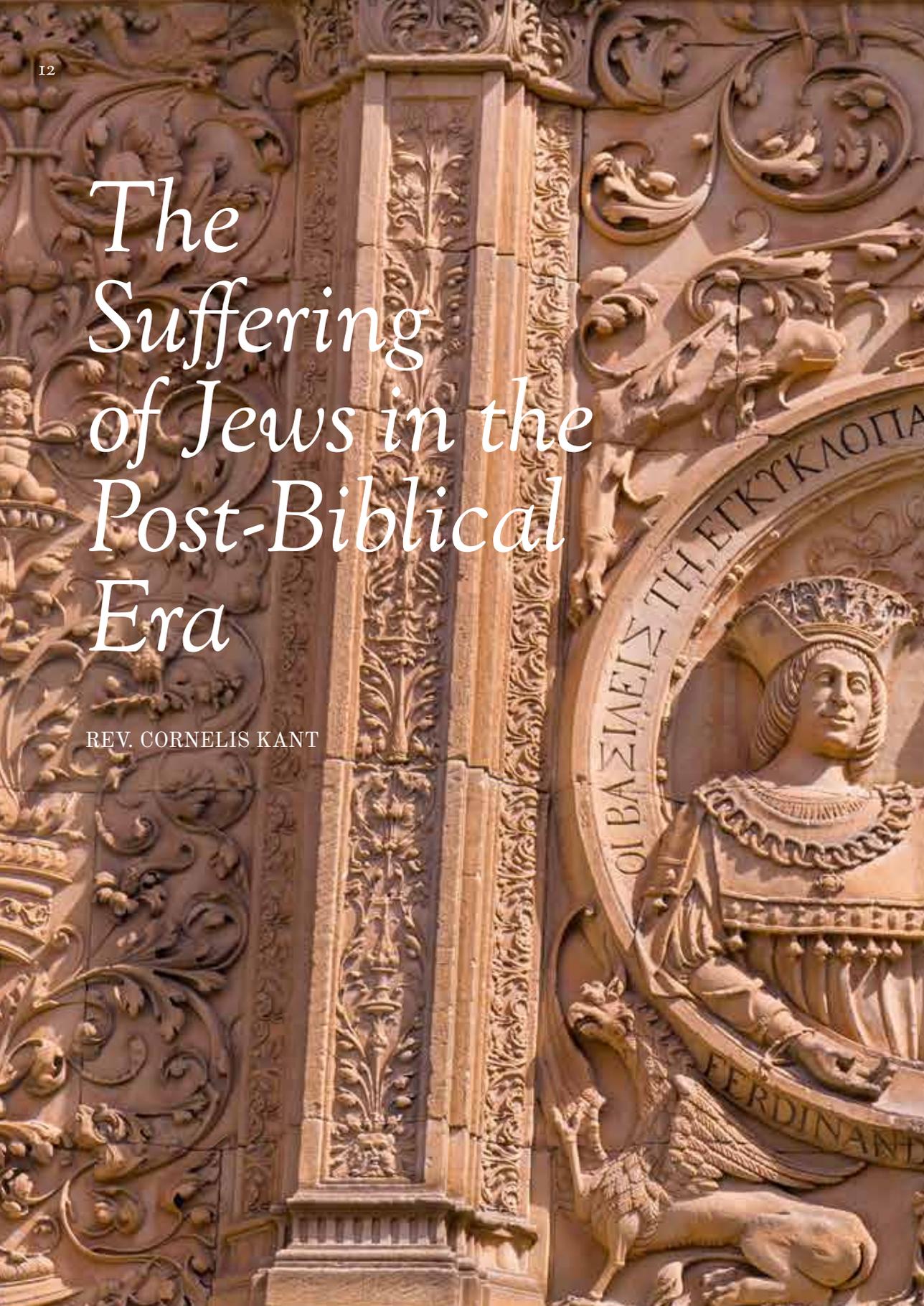
5. THEY SUFFER AS GOD'S PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVES ON EARTH

Not only do the Jewish people have royal authority over other nations for their blessing and benefit; they also have a uniquely priestly role to represent God to the nations and vice versa (Exodus 19:6). Being the one nation on earth that God chose as His own inheritance (Deuteronomy 32:8-9; 1 Kings 8:51-53), Israel both as individuals and as a whole people are identified with the God of all the earth in a unique way.

It is not surprising, then, that the enemies of God will direct their attacks against Israel as a way of hurting God. They can't reach God Himself, so they strike those whom God chose to represent Him in human history (compare Mark 12:7). An

The Suffering of Jews in the Post-Biblical Era

REV. CORNELIS KANT



In 135 AD, a group of Jews in Judea, led by Simon Bar Kochba, revolted against the Romans once again. This revolt was crushed by Emperor Hadrian's legions. Jerusalem was destroyed once more, and the city was renamed Aelia Capitolina. The land of Israel was renamed Palestine, referring to the Philistines who once lived there and went to war against Israel again and again. Over half a million Jews perished, and, as in 70 AD, many were sold into slavery. Most Jews were either expelled or fled abroad. This marked the beginning of the great Jewish diaspora, which would last for 19 centuries. The Jews were never again allowed to live in peace in their small homeland of Israel.

ANTI-JEWISH THEOLOGY

In the centuries following, Christianity grew, but so did a theology within the church that became increasingly hostile toward Jews. For many early Christians, it was inconceivable that Judaism and synagogues still existed after the coming of Christ. The Christian apologist Justin Martyr wrote in the second century that the Christian church had become 'the true Israel'. By the third century, Bishop Cyprian of Carthage referred to the Jews as 'a cursed people, and they have the devil as their father.' This theological development led to a deepening separation between Christians and Jews, which would contribute to widespread Jewish suffering during the Middle Ages. This suffering took countless forms.

EXPULSION

Jews were often seen as cursed or children of the devil, fueling the belief that they were dangerous to Christians. Some rulers decided to expel Jews from their countries. In 1290, King Edward I of England issued the Edict of Expulsion, banishing all Jews from England. This edict was not lifted until 1656. In 1394, King Charles VI of France or-

dered the expulsion of all Jews, and this ban lasted until the French Revolution. One of the most notorious expulsions occurred in 1492, with the Alhambra Decree issued by King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile. This decree forced Jews to either convert to Christianity or leave Spain. Those who refused were executed. This expulsion was one of the largest and most profound of the Middle Ages, causing unimaginable poverty and suffering for countless Jewish families.

Christianity grew, but so did a theology within the church that became increasingly hostile toward Jews

DESTRUCTION OF PROPERTY

The destruction of Jewish homes and synagogues was widespread. As early as 388 AD, Bishop Rabulas of Edessa ordered the burning of the synagogue in Callinicum. Emperor Theodosius ordered that the synagogue be rebuilt at the bishop's expense. Bishop Ambrose of Milan angrily addressed the emperor, calling the synagogue 'a place of unbelief and wickedness'. The destruction of synagogues was so common that, by 412 AD, an edict was issued forbidding such actions, and prohibiting the trampling or insulting of Jews. On Good Friday, it was common for churchgoers to loot and vandalise Jewish homes. In 1189, during the coronation of Richard the Lionheart in London, a major attack was launched on the Jewish community, resulting in the looting of homes and the destruction of synagogues. In 1492, following the expulsion of Jews from Spain, Jewish communities in several German cities, including Worms and Heidelberg, suffered violence, with synagogues destroyed and many Jews forced to renounce their faith or flee.

During the first Crusades Jewish communities along the Rhine were attacked, homes destroyed and Jews killed by individual Christians who could not afford a crusade. Martin Luther's writing in 1543 called for the destruction of Jewish homes and synagogues. In a time when

there were no social services, these destructions brought unimaginable suffering to Jewish communities.

BLOOD LIBELS

Throughout the Middle Ages, Jews were the victims of bizarre and false accusations, known as 'blood libels'. These accusations often claimed that Jews would kill Christian children to use their blood in the preparation of Passover matzos. In 1144, in Norwich, England, a Christian child named William went missing and was later found dead. Jews were falsely accused of ritually killing him to use his blood for matzos. This led to the torture and execution of several Jews. In Prague, in 1255, the body of a Christian child was found, and Jews were again falsely accused of ritual murder. This accusation resulted in the torture and deaths of several Jews and the destruction of Jewish property.

Another blood libel claimed that Jews pierced the host of the Eucharist with a nail in order to crucify Christ again. After the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which established the doctrine of transubstantiation, false rumors spread that Jews had violated the host. In 1337, in Deggendorf, Germany, the entire Jewish community was massacred due to rumors of host violation. The rumor claimed that blood had dripped from the host, making Deggendorf a site of pilgrimage until the 19th century.

In 1298, the Rhineland pogroms were sparked by accusations that Jews had violated the host. The pogroms resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Jews. In 1349, during the Black Death, Jews were falsely accused of poisoning water supplies to spread the plague. This accusation led to massacres in several cities, including Strasbourg, where 2,000 Jews were killed. The suffering of these Jewish communities is beyond comprehension. Due to social unrest and wars between Poland and Ukraine, over 50,000 Jews were brutally

murdered during horrific pogroms in Ukraine in 1648. Bohdan Chmelnitsky, the leader of the Cossacks, played a bad role in these antisemitic pogroms, but has remained a national hero to this day.

The trigger for the Damascus pogrom of February 1840 was the disappearance of an Italian monk and his servant, for which a large number of Jews were collectively tortured until they "confessed" to the murder. Antisemitism increased in Syria, with Muslims and Christians alike becoming violent, and attacking innocent Jewish people.

HEAVY RESTRICTIONS

With Emperor Constantine, persecution of Christians ended, and Christianity even became state religion. During the centuries that followed, the Church even gained more and more political power. This provided an opportunity for the Church to impose restrictive measures on Jews. In the Byzantine Empire, Jews were banned from entering Jerusalem, except on Tisha B'Av, when they mourned the destruction of the Temple.

At the Council of Toledo in 633, it was decided that the children of baptized Jews should be taken and placed in monasteries or Christian families. In many countries, Jews were forbidden from owning land, forcing them to live in cities and rely on trade or handicrafts for their livelihood. This contributed to the marginalization of Jews. As Jews were not allowed to join guilds, they were often forced into moneylending, earning them

the stigma of usury. Rulers sometimes welcomed Jews for their financial expertise, but when debts became burdensome, Jews were often murdered or expelled.

In many cities, Jews were forced to live in segregated, overcrowded areas, often in gated neighborhoods. This segregation became more common after the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215,

The pogroms resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Jews

which also required Jews to wear yellow hats or patches to distinguish them. In 1516, the ghetto in Venice was established. Pope Paul IV imposed further restrictions on Jews in 1555, limiting their occupations to the lowest classes and equating them with prostitutes and lepers. These measures made Jews second-class citizens, without the same civil rights as others.

CONVERTED JEWS

Some Jews were forcibly baptized, and some converted in Spain and Portugal to avoid deportation. These converted Jews, known as 'Marranos', often continued to practice Judaism in secret. The Inquisition, led by Grand Inquisitor Thomas de Torquemada, hunted down these secret Jews and tested their adherence to Christian teachings. Those who failed were executed, often after torture. Some Marranos fled to Latin America, but even there, they were not safe from the Inquisition.

SUFFERING UNDER ISLAM

During periods of intense persecution in Europe, Jews sometimes found refuge in Islamic countries. However, they were treated as second-class citizens (*dhimmis*), required to pay special taxes (*jizya*) and subjected to occasional mistreatment. In the early 11th century, violence against Jews occurred during periods of political instability in the Caliphate of Cordoba, Spain. In the early 19th century, Jews in Persia under the Qajar dynasty suffered severe discrimination and persecution. In Morocco, during the late 18th century, Jews were attacked by local Muslims due to economic and social tensions. Jews in Tunisia were persecuted in the 19th century, with violent outbursts in 1857. Similarly, in Algiers under French rule, Jewish communities suffered attacks by local Muslims. The Cairo pogrom of 1882 was another example of anti-Jewish violence fueled by political unrest.

Due to the pogroms in Russia in the second part of the 19th century, Jews started to return to the Land of their forefathers

Due to the pogroms in Russia in the second part of the 19th century, Jews started to return to the Land of their forefathers, Israel, which was called 'Palestine' at the time. Sheik Tahir started to fight against these Jewish immigrants. His son, mufti, Amin al-Hoesseini, incited the Arab population against the Jews and initiated pogroms. In 1929 the Jewish population of Hebron was slaughtered by Muslim Arabs. Despite some periods of relative peace, Jews in Islamic countries, like in Christian Europe, often faced persecution, expulsions, and pogroms. The 19 centuries following the destruction of the Temple were marked by an indescribable suffering for the Jewish people, a form of Holocaust that lasted almost

two millennia, which is, unlike the six-year period of the 20th century Holocaust, almost unknown by many Christians.

FROM ANTI-JUDAISM TO ANTI-SEMITISM

In the 19th century, with the separation of church and state in most countries, Jews gained more freedoms as restrictions were lifted. However, a new racial ideology

emerged, viewing Jews as an inferior race. Even baptized Jews were considered to be of inferior descent. Anti-Semitic literature flourished, and Jews faced a new wave of mockery, exclusion, and hatred. Anti-Judaism evolved into virulent anti-Semitism, which laid the groundwork for the Holocaust in the 20th century. The psychological suffering endured by Jews in the 19th century is immeasurable.

Sources

- Werner Keller, *Und wurden zerstreut unter alle Völker*
- K.A.D. Smelik, *Anti-Judaïsme en de kerk*
- Hans Jansen, *Christelijke theologie na Auschwitz*
- Dore Gold, *The fight for Jerusalem*
- Martin Luther, *Von die Juden und Ihre Lügen*
- Hans Kühner, *Der Antisemitismus der Kirche*

‘His blood be on us and on our children!’ This was the cry of Jews who wanted to see Jesus on the cross and demanded this from Pilate (Matthew 27:25).

Around 1,900 years later, millions of Jews were murdered during the Shoah (Holocaust). Time and again, there were voices that saw the Shoah as the cruel fulfilment of this ‘self-cursing’. But is this valid? In the following, I would first like to show you what happened in the Shoah. We will then turn to Matthew 27:25 and ask about possible connections.

and incinerators that ran day and night. This apparatus was carried out by thousands of people. But these people were not beasts. They were normal people like you and me who (as they said) did what they were told to do. The banality of people simply doing their job is one of the horrific aspects of the Shoah (Hanna Arendt). But this was a crucial prerequisite for the apparatus to function.

Modernity had begun to lead people to freedom and maturity. It moved God to one side in order to make room for the free development of man, to promote humanism and to make the world a better place (Enlightenment). In the twentieth century, modernity turned into the opposite of its goal. It became the epoch of the great atheistic ideologies (National Socialism, Communism), which claimed untold numbers of lives. It is estimated that 160-200 million people lost their lives in wars, civil wars and so-called 'purges' in the twentieth century. Never before had brutality been as great as in the twentieth century. But the Jews were hit hardest in the Shoah.

NAZI SPIRIT IN CHRISTIANITY

It is fatal that the Nazis' hostility towards Jews met with hardly any resistance in Christianity. How can this be explained? At this point, we have to look back at centuries of anti-Semitic church history. Replacement theology and hostility towards Jews have been widespread in Christianity since the second century. The belief that God had replaced Israel with the church of Jesus led to the Jews being categorised as enemies. Many saw the Jews as being under the judgement of God and believed that they were destined for destruction. The next misconception was that the spiritual heritage of the Jews had been passed on to the church of Jesus and that Judaism no longer had a right to exist. The Jews had to become Christians; Jewish customs and religious life had to disappear.

The fact that the Jews had refused to accept Jesus or the Christian faith was also held up. It was thought that this was proof that the Jews were stubborn and constantly resisted God. From this they concluded that the Jews were evil, abysmally evil. For the Jews were not only stubborn, but also a people of barbaric 'Christ-killers'. This judgement aroused disgust in Christian hearts – disgust and hatred. The conclusion: the Jews must go. According to this way of thinking, this was both a Christian duty and the will of God.

The cross of Jesus Christ has a terrible history at this point. It brought the Jews death instead of life. Christians discriminated against Jews, harassed, dispossessed, persecuted, raped, tortured, killed and in the end handed them over to Hitler.



new beginning. Has this new beginning happened? Germany and Europe have drawn the right conclusions from the Shoah by fundamentally renewing their state systems. Above all, this means a rejection of all forms of totalitarianism. Totalitarian systems are always directed against minorities who hold different opinions, usually also against the Jews. European societies today are constituted as democracies, i.e. deliberately anti-totalitarian. They are committed to human rights and civil liberties, are pluralistic, are committed to the rule of law and respect the separation of powers. In this way, they are equipped to protect minorities and take action against anti-Semitism. Even in democracies, not everything is for the best, certainly not, but the basis and the structures are right, and that means a lot.

The warning cry of the Shoah was also heard in Christianity

The warning cry of the Shoah was also heard in Christianity. In 'theology after Auschwitz', it was recognised that the theology that paved the way for the Shoah needed to be renewed. Great efforts are being made to cleanse theology of anti-Judaism and to re-establish Israel as the covenant people of God. But that is not all. Friends of Israel all over the world have been joining together for decades in global networks to support Israel and stand up for the Jews (e.g. Christians for Israel International). These are encouraging developments. On the negative side, however, these movements are only marginal phenomena. Broad Christianity continues on its path as if nothing had happened. This can only make you wonder: what else needs to happen for Christianity to finally wake up?

MATTHEW 27:25 REVISITED

It is time for Christianity to return. To return to its roots, to Judaism, to Israel. God has included us Christians in the noble olive tree - God's saving action with Israel. We are grafted in, we are partakers, we belong to it through Christ (Romans 11; Ephesians 2; John 10). This means that our theology must become free of supercession-

ist theological thinking, hostility towards Jews and anti-Judaism. Achieving this is a task for the century. The famous theologian Johann Baptist Metz rightly warns that we should be wary of people whose theology is the same before and after Auschwitz.

As an example, I return to the word 'blood' in Matthew 27:25: 'His blood be on us and on our children.' In the classic anti-Jewish mindset, the matter seems clear: The Jews, it is said, killed Jesus; they cursed themselves and thus brought the Shoah upon themselves. However, if we look at the parallel in John 11:50 (and John 18:14), we can come to the exact opposite conclusion: the high priest Caiaphas is in favour of having Jesus executed. He does this with the argument that it is better for 'one man to die for the people than for the whole nation to perish'. Basically, his argument is a numerical one: better one than all.

It is interesting how the evangelist categorises this event, namely as a prophetic word. This becomes clear in John 11:51-52: 'He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, 52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.' Along these lines, Matthew 27:25 can be interpreted as the opposite of a self-cursing: Jesus' blood should (and will) come upon the Jews for forgiveness. This idea leads over to Romans 11:26: 'All Israel will be saved.' Paul justifies this statement by saying that one day a Saviour (the Messiah) will come and free Israel from its sins (Romans 11:27) - a promise of salvation for Israel.

The context of the blood word also speaks against the above-mentioned misinterpretation. In Matthew 27:15-26 we find ourselves in Pilate's official residence. In addition to Pilate, there are two other groups: the chief priests or elders and the 'people'. The debate is about who should be

hundred people present and their children. Not the entire Jewish people for all time. In other words, there is no path leading from Pilate's official residence to the Shoah of the twentieth century. This path is an evil construction that seeks to blame the Jews for the Shoah - a perpetrator-victim reversal of gigantic proportions!²

REPENTANCE AND ITS FRUIT: THE RENEWAL OF THEOLOGY

We need a theology in which there is room for the Jews:

- A theology that is free from hostility towards Jews and contempt for everything Jewish, free from anti-Judaism.
- A doctrine that does not need to speak ill of the Jews in order to make the truth of the gospel shine.
- A way of thinking in which God is the God of Israel, Israel remains the people of God, the election of Israel continues to apply and God's covenant with his people endures (cf. Romans 11).

We need such a theology.

When we have such a theology, the Jews and Israel are integrated into our teaching. Only then will replacement theology be overcome. Christians then no longer see themselves as a substitute for Israel, but recognise that God is on a journey with both: with Jews and Christians. They recognise that God is present in both and encounters the world. And they understand why the world is taking action against both, because the anti-Semitic spirit is also the anti-Christian spirit. Christians and Jews are God's representatives on earth. Both belong together. Both belong – each in their own way – to God: we Christians through our faith in Jesus, the Jews through their covenant, which God has never cancelled (John Paul II).

Now, it would be wrong to undertake the renewal of theology only because the Shoah was favoured by it. In fact, it is the other way round: the Shoah is a loud warning signal that something is wrong with our theology. So, it must be corrected. If we do this, we will start to move. And this movement leads us towards the Jews. We will love Jews as God loves them (Romans 11:28b), we will respect them, value them and hold them in honour. We will pray for them, serve them, stand by them in solidarity and stand up for them. And in doing so, we will long for the Jews to one day find Jesus and 'all Israel will be saved' (Romans 11:26), as the Scriptures promise. Then Israel and the church of Jesus will be one: one flock under one shepherd, the Messiah (cf. John 10:16).

If we follow this path, we will no longer be the same in the end. We will change. We will be *Christians alongside Israel*.

NOTES

- ¹ I owe essential insights into the nature of the Shoah to: Gregor Taxacher, *Nicht endende Endzeit. Nach Auschwitz Gott in der Geschichte denken* (Gütersloh 1998).
- ² The situation is similar with other New Testament texts that initially appear hostile to Jews. The criticism there comes from Jews to Jews and is directed against the behaviour of certain groups. Nowhere is Israel as a whole discredited or even rejected. That is not even possible. Jesus had many followers among the Jewish people; many Jews believed in him. It was never the Jews who were against Jesus across the board.

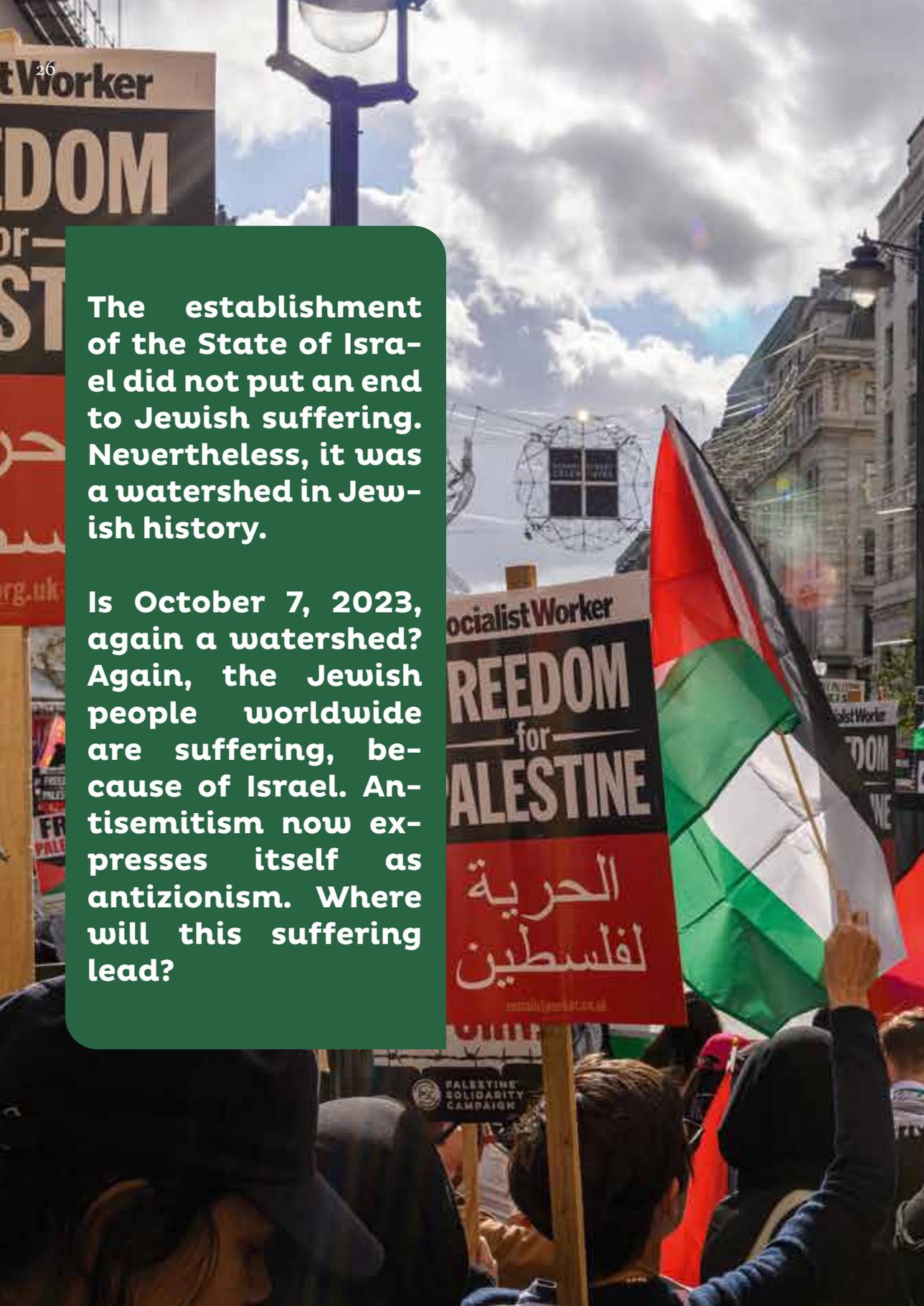
Jewish Suffering after the Shoah

KEES DE VREUGD



The establishment of the State of Israel did not put an end to Jewish suffering. Nevertheless, it was a watershed in Jewish history.

Is October 7, 2023, again a watershed? Again, the Jewish people worldwide are suffering, because of Israel. Antisemitism now expresses itself as antizionism. Where will this suffering lead?



music studios going round Golders Green knocking mezuzahs off doors. But here we are. We are living through exactly what our ancestors lived through generation after generation. And aside from a few very brave voices (thank you), we are alone in it as most people join in, or let it go by in silence.'

This is an expression of feelings shared by many Jews in Europe at this moment, and probably also in other parts of the world. It is noteworthy that already 15 years ago, Jews in Amsterdam, survivors of the Shoah, like the late Dr. Bloeme Evers-Emden (a psychologist and expert on the Shoah) felt that the atmosphere was changing. They noted a growing tendency of antisemitism that they compared to the 1930's.

Now, 15 years later, we are way beyond that. I hardly have to mention the antisemitic incidents flaming up everywhere in the world, like the murder of the young couple Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgram in Washington. They were staff members of the Israeli embassy, but they were murdered just outside the Capital Jewish Museum, not in front of the embassy. In other words, they were murdered because they were Jewish, not because they were Israeli (if that would be an excuse).

ANTI-ZIONISM

Mrs. Evers used to call antizionism the 'see-through blouse' of antisemitism. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks famously spoke of antisemitism as a mutating virus, and antizionism as its latest mutation.

Antizionism is often defended as legitimate criticism of the State of Israel. Of course, critique of the State of Israel or better, its government, can

be legitimate. Criticising the government is what Israeli citizens do all the time, like in any other democracy. Whether we as Christians should publicly utter our criticism though, is a different question, certainly in this time. I believe Israel is in need of people who support the state regardless of this or that government.

What is at stake is Israel's right to exist. This is what is going on. Antizionism denies Israel's

**After
October 7, 2023,
you would have
expected
sympathy with
the Jewish state.
But instead,
most of the media
now freely expose
their antizionist
bias.**

right to exist, more precisely, its right to exist as a Jewish state. It denies the Jewish right to self-determination. That is where antizionism comes in. Antizionists have a problem with Israel as a Jewish state, whereas they don't have any problem with Iran, or Malaysia, or Arab countries being Muslim states, or Nepal as Hindu state. So it is applying double standards, judging Israel different than other nations. That is a form of antisemitism. And when double standards are applied to the Israeli government, you see antisemi-

tism through the antizionist blouse, to use Mrs. Evers' metaphor.

That is where we are now. After October 7, 2023, you would have expected sympathy with the Jewish state. But instead, most of the media now freely expose their antizionist bias. Anti-Israel activists (this is an understatement) have taken the university campuses and the streets of the big cities all over the world. They may represent a minority view, but force their opinions into the public space in the most intimidating ways. Does it remind you of a certain period in history? To many Jews, it does.

JEW'S AMONG THE NATIONS

Why is antizionism just another mutation of antisemitism? In the past, Jews were hated because

'With all My heart and with all My soul'

(Jeremiah 32:41)

REV. JAAP DE VREUGD

This is a very remarkable word: God says He will faithfully plant Israel in the land 'with all My heart and with all My soul'. It is the final verse in a pericope with a mighty promise of salvation: restoration and return from exile and the prospect of a permanent place in the promised land. God will rejoice over His people and plant them *bechol libbi uvechol nafshi* in this land.

think this is the only text in all the Bible that speaks of God's heart and soul. God's heart is spoken of more often, but in the combination 'heart and soul' only in this place.

In Hebrew, as in other languages, this means to indicate an intense connection; it is even more so when you say that you do something 'with heart and soul' than that you do something 'gladly'. In fact, you are committed to it to the core of your being. And although in the context it has directly to do with the return to the land, I think we may without objection relate the expression more broadly to the people; God declares, that He has committed Himself with heart and soul to the people of His choice, Israel. This is nothing less than a declaration of love. To the core of His being, God has committed Himself to Israel.

Perhaps you may even say it has to do with the identity of the Eternal; after all, He also calls Himself the God of Israel. God does not want to be God without His choice with heart and soul for Israel. The Scriptures bear witness in many places that God loves Israel and therefore chooses her. In this context, the well-known metaphor from Zechariah also rings true: 'For whoever touches you touches the apple of His eye.'

CHURCH DECLINE

Today we are experiencing a huge decline of church and Christianity in Europe, and certainly also in the Netherlands. Every week, several churches are being closed and many tens of thousands have left the churches in recent years. Modern idolatry and revived paganism are replacing it. Internally, there is spiritual superficiality and confusion in the churches, of going along with the zeitgeist.

Books and reports are published. Remedies are being offered. Someone spoke of a judgment on the lukewarmness of Christians in Europe. There is much in that.

But there is an aspect that I find painfully missing in discussions about church abandonment. What if it also has to do with God's pain over what was done to His people? Many people today would rather forget it, but we are far from over the fact that it could come to the murder of the Jews, the Shoah, in Christian Europe. Could

the judgment be that the Eternal is silent and hides His countenance because of the suffering inflicted on the apple of His eye? There is a connection between the empty homes of the Jews and the empty churches in Europe. Secularisation, spiritual confusion have struck Europe since Israel was almost entirely murdered amidst the European Christian nations and churches. This must have touched the Eternal in his heart and soul. Whoever scolds Israel kicks God on the heart. There will be a renewal of the church only if the church repents to the God of Israel and the Israel of God.

How do Christians, churches stand in this situation? Perhaps it is only a remnant of Christianity in Europe that has something to do with Israel, that has come to understand that

**The God of Israel
is alive
and we have
the prophetic Word,
which is
completely
reliable**

Christian faith without the relationship with Israel is uprooted and thus has no opportunities for growth. A remnant, because many in the churches do not know what to do with Israel. I am afraid that that the night of the Holocaust and the miracle of Israel's revival no longer mean anything to many people, that consequently they do not have the willingness to critically approach their own being and tradition in relation to Israel, that consequently they do not have an eye for Israel's prophetic restoration either, and thus ultimately lose sight of hope for the world.

Frenetic programmes to revive church and Christianity then do not help to overcome the brutal force of secularisation, modern paganism and the threat of Islamisation. European Christianity died in Auschwitz.

Is it all hopeless then? No! The God of Israel is alive and we have the prophetic Word, which is completely reliable. That Word calls the churches and everyone to repen-

tance to the God of Israel, and also to repentance to Israel. To true communion, solidarity with the people of God's covenant. Unconditional, truly unfailing and heartfelt communion with Israel: people, land and state. Opening the Word, raising the voice, providing knowledge and information, allowing history to speak - that is the vocation of Christians who want to be in solidarity with Israel, because they simply cannot do otherwise because of the God of Israel they have come to know in Jesus the Jew. That is the calling of Christians for Israel. Convinced that the Eternal One is - still - committed to His people with all His heart and with all His soul.

Rev Jacob de Vreugd (1945-2024) was a minister in the Netherlands Reformed Church and chairman of Christians for Israel.

CHRISTIANS FOR
ISRAEL.
INTERNATIONAL

c4israel.org

